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Letter dated 26 June 2001 from the Permanent Representative of Morocco to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

In preparation for the special session of the General Assembly on Children, to be held at United Nations Headquarters, New York, from 19 to 21 September 2001, Morocco has organized a number of forums and conferences to contribute to this important session.

They include:

The Arab Regional Civil Society and Non-Governmental Organizations' Forum on Children held in Rabat from 15 to 19 February 2001;

The Summit of African First Ladies held in Marrakesh from 20 to 22 April 2001 on the topic "The girl child: a global movement";

The Arab-African Conference of Ministers of Finance, organized in Marrakesh from 21 to 22 May 2001 on the topic "Resources and financing to advance the cause of children".

In this connection, I have the honour to request you to have the following documents circulated as documents of the twenty-seventh special session of the General Assembly:

The Marrakesh Declaration — Summit of African First Ladies (Annex I);

The general report of the Summit of African First Ladies (Annex II);

The report of the Arab-African Conference of Ministers of Finance (Annex III);

The Declaration of the Rabat Non-Governmental Organizations' Forum (Annex IV).

(*Signed*) Mohamed **Bennouna**
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Annexes to the letter dated 26 June 2001 from the Permanent Representative of Morocco to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

Annex I

[Original: French]

Marrakesh Declaration
Summit of African First Ladies

The Girl Child: a Global Movement

We, the African first ladies participating in the First Summit of First Ladies, focusing on the girl child, meeting in Marrakesh from 20 to 22 April 2001,

Considering that the recognition of human rights and their effective exercise constitutes the cornerstone of all sustainable human development,

Recognizing that the rights of the girl child and of women form an integral and inseparable part of the inherent rights of all human beings to dignity, and hence necessitate equality of rights between men and women,

Recalling the conclusions and recommendations of the major international conferences dealing with women's rights, population, education, social development, combating poverty, the environment, the promotion of peace and the establishment of a culture of non-violence,

Recalling the whole body of international instruments, including the Charter of Human and Peoples' Rights and the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which constitute the foundation of the survival, advancement and development of children in general and of the girl child in particular,

Sharing the new vision of the twenty-first century for a world worthy of children, as provided in the draft declaration of the special session of the United Nations General Assembly on Children scheduled for September 2001,

Recalling all Africa's achievements and gains in favour of women, the girl child and children in general,

Paying tribute to the cooperation and collaboration that prevails among the African countries in a new approach of family, inter-generational, national, regional and international solidarity while respecting the identities and cultural specificities inherent in each people, which in no way calls in question the recognized universality of human rights,

We, the first ladies of Africa, are convinced that the changing face of the world and its balances in the era of globalization, which admittedly has advantages, is causing for the African countries, particularly the least developed, only an increase in disparities and a deepening of the rifts in society:

We are also convinced that Africa, being at the heart of the economic, social and cultural changes in the world, cannot remain isolated from this new dynamics.

We, the first ladies, undertake to defend:

The development, protection and recognition of the rights of the girl child in Africa within the context of a global movement for the development of Africa which calls for:

Ceaseless advocacy and sensitization of political decision makers, officials and all those working on behalf of children;

Eradication of all forms of gender-based discrimination, whether de jure or de facto;

Global mobilization for development and the spread of education and campaign against illiteracy, of which the girl child is the first victim; increased effort to facilitate access by girls to high-quality education;

Guaranteed equality of access to health care, and promotion and reproductive health to permit greater awareness of and protection against the HIV/AIDS pandemic;

Strengthening of all legislative, educational, social, cultural and information activities and efforts to eradicate sexual abuse and traditional practices that

impair the physical and moral integrity of the girl child, including genital mutilation;

Combating violence within the family, of which women and girl children are the first targets;

Education in respect for and promotion of human rights by encouraging the inclusion of this dimension in school curricula and in informal education programmes so as to establish a culture of the rights of the child;

Combating the employment of and trafficking in girl children and their enlistment in armies;

Development of economic and social development programmes and projects for women by facilitating access to income-generating activities, thus freeing the girl child from the work burden that impedes her school attendance and development;

Major involvement of the media in advocacy for children;

Strengthening of the partnership with non-governmental organizations and all components of civil society in favour of children;

Involvement of the private sector and of national, regional and international financial institutions with a view to reconsidering their development financing strategies in order to guarantee the rights of the child, by attaching prime importance to debt reconversion, or even debt cancellation in the case of the least developed countries, to giving effect to the 20/20 initiative and to better resource allocation in favour of social programmes for children;

The eradication of poverty and the establishment of peace;

Ongoing efforts to maintain the peace and ensure the development of human rights in Africa;

Lastly, we, the first ladies of Africa, remain convinced that the eradication of poverty starts first with children;

We, the first ladies of Africa, consider the present Summit to be a historic moment and the issue of the girl child to be the cornerstone of a worldwide movement for the development of Africa and of a world fit for children. We undertake to ensure follow-up of the Declaration of the Marrakesh Summit through an appropriate mechanism.

Annex II

[Original: French]

General report of the Summit of African First Ladies

"The girl child: a global movement for the development of Africa"

Marrakesh, 20-22 April 2001

Under the high patronage of His Majesty King Mohammed VI, the city of Marrakesh hosted an unprecedented summit of African first ladies from 20 to 22 April 2001. The discussion focused on the girl child in the context of a global movement for African development.

The Summit, which was attended by a large number of African first ladies, was opened by an address given by Her Royal Highness Princess Lalla Meryem, "the children's princess". Her Royal Highness is President of the Moroccan Association for the support of UNICEF and of the National Child Rights Monitoring Centre, has made the best interests of children her primary concern and has concentrated all her efforts to ensure the full enjoyment by all Moroccan children of their rights.

Paying tribute to the first ladies of Africa and to the tireless efforts of UNICEF on behalf of African girl children, Her Royal Highness Princess Lalla Meryem recalled the interest accorded by her august father, His Late Majesty Hassan II, an advocate for the rights of the child. Following his father's example, His Majesty King Mohammed VI had, since his enthronement, made the cause of children a national priority. A national commission bringing together all the national authorities of Morocco, both the governmental authorities and associations, the presidency of which had been conferred on His Royal Highness Prince Moulay Rachid, was engaged on the development of a national plan of action on behalf of children in the forthcoming decade. Her Royal Highness Princess Lalla Meryem mentioned the historical significance of the forthcoming special session of the General Assembly of the United Nations in September 2001 devoted to children which would be an essential platform for advocacy in support of "a world fit for children".

Highlighting the efforts made by African countries to promote the survival, development, protection and participation of children in general, and of the girl child in particular, Her Royal Highness drew attention to the difficulties that hampered concerted action in Africa on behalf of children, difficulties which continued to be mainly economic and financial, with indebtedness as the first obstacle.

Recalling the historical dimension of the Summit, Her Royal Highness pointed out that "all of us wish to contribute to improving the living conditions of our children", and to achieve that through mutual competition between all the vital elements of the African countries. Her Royal Highness emphasized the importance of the ongoing exchange of mutual experience in order to find appropriate solutions and take up the challenge of the next decade: advancement of the status of African girl children.

In their statements, the eminent African first ladies paid tribute to that initiative which they fully endorsed, and highlighted the attention that should be paid to African girl children as the future depositaries of values and in view of their role in the upbringing of the young people.

The distinguished presentations made emphasized that the beliefs common to all participants encountered social, educational, cultural and, above all, economic difficulties.

In reviewing the efforts made by their respective countries, the first ladies addressed the following basic question: how can the imperatives of macroeconomic balance, that are imposed by the various structural adjustment plans and give rise to major shortfalls at the level of basic social sectors, be reconciled with the more effective allocation of resources for the benefit of social programmes, particularly those aimed at children?

All the first ladies remained convinced that the upbringing of girl children made possible the upbringing of the entire nation and that emphasis

should therefore be placed on that educational dimension as an indispensable precondition for any sustainable social change.

The distinguished first ladies made a firm commitment to engage in advocacy and to promote awareness, at the highest level and in all forums for the benefit of girl children, by motivating financial institutions by calling on them to assume their responsibilities with respect to the survival, development, protection and participation of children in general and of the girl child in particular.

A lively feature of the work of the Summit of African First Ladies was the holding of two round tables, respectively: "Assessment of the situation of the girl child in Africa" and "Reflection on solutions and measures to ensure the advancement of the girl child".

"Assessment of the situation of the girl child in Africa"

The round table on the assessment of the situation of the girl child in Africa was introduced and moderated by Ms. Zoulikha Nasri, Adviser to His Majesty King Mohammed VI. She underlined the unfailing and long-standing commitment of Her Royal Highness Princess Lalla Meryem to children in general and to girl children in particular. Ms. Zoulikha Nasri recalled that Her Royal Highness Princess Lalla Meryem had chaired the first symposium of the Maghreb countries on the question of the girl child in May 1991 in Casablanca. During the symposium, Her Royal Highness Princess Lalla Meryem had highlighted the special precariousness of the situation of girl children which was bound up with discriminatory attitudes towards them.

A glowing tribute was paid to Her Royal Highness for having presided over an unprecedented campaign against the shameful exploitation of children in employment. That campaign had called on all the vital elements of the country to strive to ensure acceptable living conditions and opportunities for development for girl children who were arbitrarily employed as domestic servants. All over Africa, girl children from rural areas, from which such servant girls came, suffered the greatest loss of their fundamental rights because of the geographical, economic and cultural conditions in which they were born and grew up.

What is the situation today?

Ms. Zoulikha Nasri recalled the statement by the late James Grant, Executive Director of UNICEF, which unfortunately still applied, to the effect that far more boys than girls learned to read and write in the developing world, that in certain countries twice as many boys as girls were taken to health centres for treatment and that it was unacceptable that the right to work, the right to social protection, the legal status, the right to own property, and even the civil and political liberties of individuals, should depend upon a single chromosome.

Eminent panellists — Ms. Agnès Aïdoo and Ms. Aïssata Moumouni, consultants, and Ms. Misiak Elias, the representative of UNICEF in Jordan — helped to outline the status of the girl child in the world in general and in Africa in particular.

They emphasized the youthfulness of the old continent of Africa, the cradle of humanity, over 50 per cent of whose population currently comprised children under the age of 18. Over and beyond differences between countries, the status of the girl child in Africa was still characterized by features that were detrimental to their dignity and development. Despite the progress achieved, the situation still fell short of the hopes of a continent that aspired to fulfil its commitments to all its children.

Among those commitments, it must be borne in mind that almost all African countries had ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child and had thus officially endorsed the principles of non-discrimination, the best interests of the child, the guarantee of the right to survival, to development and protection, and the right to participation.

The main concerns with respect to the situation of the girl child in Africa were the following:

The endemic poverty maintained by debt-servicing which consumed a major part of GNP;

The shortage of infrastructures, in particular, school infrastructures;

The preference of parents for the education of boys;

The poverty associated with food taboos which gave rise to anaemia affecting between 75 and 95 per cent of girls aged over 15 years;

The survival of traditional attitudes and discriminatory social perceptions;

Early and forced marriages and pregnancies which sometimes threatened their lives and were always detrimental to their physical and intellectual development;

Dropping out of school as a result of such marriages and pregnancies;

The irreparable and marginalizing after-effects and handicaps which also resulted from such early marriages and pregnancies;

HIV/AIDS which affected girls more than boys because of their greater biological vulnerability;

Acts of violence from which girls suffered specifically: genital mutilations and mass rape during armed conflicts, which was now considered by the United Nations as a crime against humanity;

The burdens of child labour and domestic responsibilities which were borne by girl children in addition to their frequently being employed in domestic service;

Finally, child trafficking, including trafficking in girl children leading to their enrolment in prostitution rings.

It was also to be noted that the participation of girls and women in public life remained very limited, in contrast to their economic role.

The question of girl children was that of the very future of Africa. What kind of legacy did we wish to leave to Africa? It was the girl children of today who would bring up the leaders of tomorrow.

All the panellists agreed to emphasize that education was fundamental to enhancing the status of the girl child. Only education would enable them:

To manage their fecundity more effectively;

To contribute to lowering child mortality; and

To take more effective charge of their lives and that of their families.

The generalization of education must, however, go hand in hand with an improvement in its quality.

There were, however, some glimmers of hope to offset the depressing picture given by the panellists of the situation of the girl child. Mention must be made of one positive achievement for Africa. The strong mobilization of African Governments and non-governmental organizations had done much to ensure that the question of the girl child was given prominence in the Beijing Platform for Action. Similarly, in September 2001, at the special session of the United Nations General Assembly on children, the question of the girl child was to be given priority in the outcome document: "A world fit for children". The Summit of First Ladies was to be regarded as a historic event and the question of the girl child as the cornerstone of a global movement for Africa.

"Reflection on courses of action and measures to ensure the advancement of the girl child in Africa"

A round table on courses of action and measures to ensure the advancement of the girl child in Africa was moderated by Ms. Rima Salah, Regional Director for West and Central Africa. Ms. Aïcha Belarbi, Ms. Aïcha Bah Diallo and Changu Mannathoko also contributed as participants to the successful discussion.

The most fruitful statements and discussions during the round table concerned the analysis of the situation of girl children. Numerous courses of action, measures and recommendations were proposed in response to the highly complex issues raised by the situation of African girl children, as set out below.

For an environment conducive to the advancement of the girl child

Establishment of a global development strategy to make the African continent part of a new long-term human development process capable of responding to public expectations and making the advancement of women and the girl child a major priority;

Consolidation of democratic institutions and strengthening of human rights which were the essential preconditions for the development and implementation of the rights of women and girl children;

Construction and preservation of peace through the peaceful settlement of conflicts, conflict prevention and the establishment of political and institutional conditions advocating coexistence, tolerance, dialogue and the culture of peace;

Revival of, and efforts to give effect to, the proposal made by His Late Majesty King Hassan II to adopt a "Marshall Plan" for the all-round development of Africa;

Militating on behalf of debt cancellation and the conversion of debt to investment in social sectors;

Providing for the effective and appropriate mobilization of financial resources for all social development initiatives;

Ensuring the effective implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women;

Taking the gender dimension into account in the development all national policies and programmes;

Taking substantial measures to guarantee the rights of women which were inseparably linked with those of children, and of the girl child in particular;

Making decision makers and the public aware of the rights of the child, and particularly the rights of girl children and women;

Creating national observatories for children's rights which would form a network facilitating coordination and the development of an African strategy for children;

Promoting action-oriented research on girl children and their rights in order to make an impact on reactionary attitudes and mind;

Establishment of national data banks broken down according to sex and age which would enable decision makers to devise and develop strategies on behalf of the girl child;

Establishment of a committee for following-up and evaluating the recommendations of the Summit which would serve to support the advocacy of the African first ladies who would appoint a focal point for girl children in their respective countries and ensure the preparation of an annual report;

Organization of major campaigns to promote awareness of the rights of girl children and women using the positive values of African culture to popularize the principles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.

Specific measures to promote the rights of the girl child

Ensuring the harmonization of legislative texts in accordance with the principles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women;

Ensuring the participation of children, particularly girl children, in any decision-making process concerning their rights;

Mobilizing non-governmental organizations on behalf of children, particularly girl children, by establishing a firm partnership between the public authorities, civil society and local communities;

Involving the modern media and traditional channels of communication in the general mobilization on behalf of girl children and women, and projecting a positive image of them;

Promoting the access of women to decision-making positions as a means of expediting the effective implementation of commitments made;

Making decision makers and the public aware of questions of the rights of women, children and particularly girl children;

Ensuring that education becomes the top priority and that all parties involved (public authorities, civil society, local authorities, the community, development partners) act in partnership with respect to political, family and community matters and educational systems;

Making the access of all children to school the first priority by ensuring parity at the school enrolment stage and equality between the sexes in all cycles of education and training;

Integration of non-formal education as a means of combating dropping out of school;

Encouragement for the promotion and development of pre-school education;

Giving a positive image of girl children and women in school textbooks and syllabuses;

Training of male and particularly female teachers in rural areas who are a major role model for girl children, as well as all people who interact with girl children (health personnel, law officers, and so forth);

Providing teachers with training materials to enable them to eradicate the sexist values which prevail in our schools;

Developing innovative approaches to the education of girls based on the improved adaptation of schools to their environment, close attention to the needs of children and the involvement of parents in the running of schools;

Promoting the awareness of fathers and mothers so that they provide an equitable upbringing for their children by giving boys and girls the same degree of attention;

Ensuring the access of all children to health services through the generalization of vaccination, timely screening, the effective prevention of certain diseases and access to basic health care;

Ensuring balanced nutrition for girl children by investing in the struggle against poverty and against food taboos to eliminate malnutrition-related diseases and disabilities;

Ensuring that the public authorities give particular attention to disabled girl children, and promoting public awareness in order to counter their marginalization;

Strengthening health education in school curriculums including primary health care, reproductive health, sexually transmitted diseases and specifically AIDS;

Criminalization of the intentional transmission of AIDS;

Ensuring that the specific needs of adolescent girls are taken into account in the design and implementation of development programmes and strategies;

Creation of employment for young graduates;

Protecting children against economic exploitation by adopting national legislation consistent with international labour standards and providing for penalties to ensure the effective implementation of such legislation;

Ensuring continuous protection for children by the international community in conflict areas while paying particular attention to the situation of girl children;

Enactment of strong legislation to ensure the protection of girl children against all forms of violence, including physical abuse, forced and early marriage, sexual harassment and sexual abuse, including paedophilia and genital mutilation;

Drafting and ensuring compliance with legislation to protect girl children, particularly those in domestic service, against abuse by employers;

Combating child trafficking at the international level while ensuring the effective implementation of the recommendations made at major conferences and the funding of repatriation and reintegration programmes for the child victims of such trafficking.

There will be no possibility of putting all these measures and recommendations into effect, so that they have a global and positive impact, unless globalization is made more humane, thereby avoiding any increase in the current economic and social imbalance between countries.

Annex III

[Original: French]

Report of the Arab-African Conference of Ministers of Finance preparatory to the special session of the General Assembly for follow-up to the World Summit for Children, September 2001

(Marrakesh, 21-23 May 2001)

1. The Kingdom of Morocco and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) held an Arab-African Conference of Ministers of Finance in Marrakesh from 21 to 23 May 2001. The theme of the Conference was "Resources and financing to advance the cause of children".

2. This event was held in preparation for the forthcoming special session of the United Nations General Assembly on children, to be held in New York from 19 to 21 September 2001, and in response to General Assembly resolution 54/93 of December 1999, particularly its paragraph 15, which "invites Governments and relevant organizations, in particular the United Nations Children's Fund, as well as regional and subregional organizations, to undertake reviews of progress achieved since the World Summit for Children, and encourages appropriate national, regional and international preparatory activities with a view to contributing to the preparations for the special session and building partnerships for and with children".

3. The Conference was presided over by His Majesty King Mohammed VI and was attended by Mr. Blaise Compaoré, President of the Republic of Burkina Faso; Mr. Cassam Uteem, President of the Republic of Mauritius; and Mr. Koumba Yala, President of the Republic of Guinea-Bissau.

4. The following countries took part in the Conference: Algeria, Angola, Bahrain, Benin, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cameroon, Chad, Congo, Côte d'Ivoire, Egypt, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, Gambia, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Iraq, Kenya, Kuwait, Lebanon, Liberia, Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, Mali, Mauritania, Mauritius, Morocco, Niger, Oman, Palestine, Qatar, Sao Tome and Principe, Saudi Arabia, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Somalia, Sudan, Swaziland, Syrian Arab Republic, Tunisia, United Arab Emirates and Yemen.

5. Canada, Norway and the United States of America participated as observers.

6. Also taking part in the Conference were Ms. Carol Bellamy, Executive Director of UNICEF, and representatives of the following United Nations agencies and programmes, international organizations and international and regional financial institutions: World Health Organization (WHO), Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), World Food Programme (WFP), United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (UNHCHR), Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), World Bank, International Monetary Fund (IMF), African Development Bank (AfDB), Arab Bank for Economic Development in Africa (ABEDA), Islamic Development Bank (IsDB), Arab Fund for Economic and Social Development (AFESD), Arab Monetary Fund (AMF), Saudi Development Fund (SDF) and Arab Gulf Programme for the United Nations Development Organizations (AGFUND).

7. The Moroccan private and banking sectors, local authorities and non-governmental organizations contributed actively to the work of the Conference.

8. The aims of the Conference were to analyse the priorities to be set for children in Africa and the Arab world; to consider the resources, particularly financial resources, needed to guarantee the full implementation of the various commitments undertaken for the survival, development, participation and protection of children and the promotion of their rights; and to join forces to put the Global Movement for Children into practice by mobilizing additional resources and implementing innovative financing mechanisms in priority areas for Arab and African children.

9. This Conference, which, from the outset, represented a follow-up to the Arab Civil Society Forum (Rabat, 15-19 February 2001) and the Summit of African First Ladies (Marrakesh, 20-22 April 2001), made it possible to assemble, around the same table, all actors concerned with the situation of children (Governments, local authorities, the private sector, United Nations agencies, associations, regional and international financial institutions, etc.) for the purpose of considering together how to close the gap between the ambitious undertakings contained in the various legal and political instruments relating to children and the increasingly manifest scarcity of financial resources earmarked for their implementation.

10. Motivated by the desire to join the determined effort to build a world fit for children — a world of peace, stability, socio-economic development, prosperity, tolerance and justice — the participants drew up a series of practical recommendations and specific proposals to enrich and encourage constructive debate at the various round table discussions to be held at the General Assembly's special session on children. They also expressed their conviction that the attainment of the goals established for the coming decade would depend on the elaboration of an action-oriented, proactive, innovative strategy, in a spirit of solidarity, to mobilize additional financial resources, particularly for sub-Saharan Africa.

11. The work of the Conference was enhanced by the effective presidency of His Majesty King Mohammed VI at the opening meeting and by the important opening address given by Her Royal Highness Princess Lalla Meryem.

12. Her Royal Highness, while reiterating the unwavering and resolute commitment of the Kingdom of Morocco to working with the other Arab and African countries to improve the situation of children in those countries, stressed that the mobilization of additional financial resources to advance the cause of children demanded a strong political will on the part of Governments to incorporate funding for programmes and projects to benefit children into their budget planning and implementation policies.

13. Moreover, those efforts must draw upon the contributions of all the partners concerned, including the Governments of countries all over the world that had close relations with the Arab and African countries, as well as international organizations, specialized agencies, regional institutions and national and local associations; in sum, all the components of civil society, particularly non-governmental organizations active in that field.

14. Her Royal Highness concluded that, while democracy had become a yardstick for assessing the quality of relations at the national and international levels, advocacy for children remained the most meaningful measure of the humanitarian spirit.

15. The Presidents of Burkina Faso, the Republic of Mauritius and Guinea-Bissau delivered important statements at this opening meeting, in which they lauded Morocco's efforts to help vulnerable groups in society, including children, and praised the many initiatives taken by the Kingdom to facilitate the preparations for the forthcoming special session of the General Assembly on children.

16. Mr. Blaise Compaoré, President of Burkina Faso, stressed that the great strides made in developing countries since the World Summit for Children had nevertheless fallen short of the expectations of the Arab and African countries.

17. In his statement, Mr. Cassam Uteem, President of the Republic of Mauritius, used the successful experience of his country to highlight the very positive socio-economic benefits of investment in children, and called on the international community to continue to support the sustained efforts of countries that had made progress to ensure that their gains were preserved.

18. The President of Guinea-Bissau, Mr. Koumba Yala, called on the African countries to set aside the mentality of violence and war in favour of dialogue and tolerance. In relation to the situation of children in Palestine, he urged the international community to put a stop to the crimes committed by Israel against Palestinian children in the occupied territories.

19. The work of the Conference was structured around the following three topics:

- Assessment of the situation of children in Africa and the Arab world and priority-setting for policies to promote the well-being of children in those regions;
- Financing and governance;
- Financing and partnership.

20. In addition, a "brainstorming" group open to all participants and a non-governmental organizations' forum enriched the work of the Conference by making a number of proposals and recommendations.

21. Prior to the various plenary meetings of the Conference, Ms. Carol Bellamy, Executive Director of UNICEF, read out a message from the Secretary-General of the United Nations in which the latter recalled that, despite the progress made in the protection of children, many children were still deprived of basic education, access to health care and proper nutrition. Each year, more than 10 million children died of preventable diseases such as measles and diarrhoea. The commitments undertaken by Governments to promote the rights of the child were not yet reflected in the structuring of national budgets or in economic policy reforms.

I. Assessment of the situation of children in Africa and the Arab world and priority-setting for policies to promote the well-being of children in those regions

22. Ten years after the World Summit for Children, which culminated in the adoption of a Declaration and Plan of Action on the survival, protection and development of children, undeniable progress has been made in Africa and the Arab world, particularly in terms of immunization (with remarkable success in the fight against polio), promotion of breastfeeding and reduction of diarrhoeal diseases, malnutrition and deficiency diseases. This has contributed to a drastic reduction in the under-five mortality rate in the Arab world and Africa. In the 1990s, significant advances were also made in basic education, particularly for girls, and led to reduced illiteracy rates.

23. Nonetheless, the progress made over the past decade cannot overshadow the many obstacles that continue to block the attainment of the goals of the Summit and even the setbacks experienced in a number of African countries and some Arab countries with respect to certain basic indicators of child well-being. These obstacles are due, inter alia, to the resurgence of armed conflicts, rampant poverty, the external debt burden, inadequate access to developed-country markets, the substantial decline in official development assistance (which stands at 0.24 per cent of gross national product (GNP), well below the target of 0.7 per cent set by the United Nations more than 30 years ago), the steady erosion of the terms of trade for certain commodities, insufficient political will and the effect of rapid demographic growth coupled with generally slow economic growth.

24. The sectors which have lagged behind the most are, in particular, access to health care, to better nutrition and to high-quality basic education for all children; the fight against malaria; and new problems such as the HIV/AIDS pandemic, violence against children, discrimination against women and girls, the effects of armed conflict and of the displacement of children within their own country, refugee children, transboundary trafficking in children and their sexual exploitation and recruitment into prostitution, pornography and drug trafficking networks and the illegal immigration of children.

25. In Africa, the HIV/AIDS pandemic causes more deaths than any other disease; 15 million people on the African continent have died of AIDS since the beginning of the 1980s. Young Africans account for nearly all of the 10.4 million children under the age of 15 who have been orphaned by this pandemic, which has reduced life expectancy to 40 years in some African countries. All the studies and surveys conducted in this area show that ignorance among young people and lack of sex education and awareness-raising are the primary reasons for the continued spread of this pandemic.

26. In the area of immunization, the results achieved are still uneven. In the Middle East and North Africa, the regional average immunization rate for children under the age of five is 84 per cent; in sub-Saharan Africa it is 48 per cent, and the rates in 15 countries are still lower than this average. The under-five mortality rate is 173 per thousand in sub-Saharan Africa and 63 per thousand in the Middle East and North Africa.

27. With regard to nutrition and the control of deficiency diseases, the regional average for children under the age of five suffering from delayed growth is about 40 per cent in sub-Saharan Africa and about 25 per cent in the Middle East and North Africa region. The situation in respect of iodine and vitamin A deficiency is even more alarming.

28. Malnutrition and nutritional deficiencies have tragic consequences for the intellectual development and school performance of the child.

29. With regard to education, many children are still being denied this fundamental right, particularly girls

and children living in difficult circumstances. In sub-Saharan Africa, the net rate of primary school enrolment is 51 per cent for girls, compared with 59 per cent for boys. In the Middle East and North African region, these figures are 77 per cent and 85 per cent respectively. Access to universal, high-quality basic education is still problematic and must be elevated to the level of a national emergency.

30. Children continue to be victims of various forms of violence, ranging from forced enlistment in armed conflicts (Africa has had more than 30 wars since 1970) to landmines scattered throughout the region (44 million in Africa, some dating back to the Second World War).

31. At the same time, the effects of population displacements, particularly as a result of conflicts, inevitably lead to the separation of children from their families, which makes them vulnerable to being enlisted and recruited by militias.

32. Furthermore, the participants strongly denounced the fierce and inhuman repression against Palestinian children and use of armed force by Israel, in violation of the humanitarian conventions on the protection of civilian populations in occupied territories, and called upon the international community to condemn these acts.

33. The war waged by Israel against the Palestinian civilian population, and the crimes perpetrated against children in particular, illustrate Israel's lack of respect for children's right to life and constitute a challenge to the universal conscience and a total violation of the provisions of the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

34. The participants also made an urgent appeal for the lifting of the embargo imposed on the Iraqi people, the main consequence of which is the serious malnutrition suffered by Iraqi children and numerous diseases causing the death of thousands of children.

35. Alongside the concerns which cannot be addressed within the narrow framework of this Conference, it is imperative to set priorities with a view to the formation of a new vision to guide the international community towards a "world fit for children", particularly in Africa and in the Arab world.

36. These priorities may be summarized as follows:

- A general mobilization of all actors to combat the resurgence of the HIV/AIDS pandemic, involving children and particularly adolescents in the design of programmes for prevention, awareness-raising, advocacy and education, which are indisputably the best line of defence;
- An integrated approach to ensure a good start in life for infants, comprising, inter alia, universal immunization against the major infant and child diseases, improved nutrition, and the promotion of the integrated management of childhood diseases;
- Universal access to high-quality basic education, particularly for girls;
- Better protection for children in difficult circumstances, particularly children in conflict with the law (through the development of juvenile justice), street children, working children, refugee children, child victims of armed conflicts and economic sanctions, children with disabilities, child victims of abuse and discrimination, etc.

II. Financing and governance

37. The realization of the economic, social and cultural rights of the child is not only an ethical imperative but also an investment, with positive economic effects which have an unquestionable impact on sustainable human development.

38. Good governance requires the establishment of a democracy which is concerned about promoting human rights and consolidating justice as a means of strengthening social cohesion and equity.

39. Aware of the still precarious situation of Arab and African children, the Conference participants recognized the need to achieve significant progress in mobilizing additional resources for the benefit of children and making better use of available resources (governance).

40. The participants noted that national budgets are the main and constant source of financing for child-oriented policies. Foreign aid represents only 2 to 8 per cent of budgetary expenditure allocated to social sectors.

41. The participants also recognized that the format of national budgets does not give a precise idea of the allocations for children or of the trends of such

allocations. There was consensus, however, about the need to further increase the budgetary allocations to children.

42. They also felt that institutional measures to protect the interests of children are often weak. Each governmental agency or department executes its programmes and projects separately, often without any coordination.

43. Studies have also shown that policies to benefit children would have much to gain not only from increased resources, but also from a better utilization of existing resources.

44. The participants stressed:

- The importance of allocating resources at appropriate stages in the life cycle, particularly from conception to early infancy;
- The need for actions to benefit children to be more firmly anchored at the local level;
- The value of a decentralization and deconcentration of public services which may not only help maximize the efficiency of public expenditure but also generate considerable potential for innovative initiatives by local communities through better neighbourhood services;
- The importance of a more participatory approach involving civil society in view of the many advantages in terms of efficiency, transparency and appreciation of the actual impact of expenditure devoted to children.

III. Financing and partnership

45. In this era of globalization, characterized by a stagnation of public resources allocated to development, the participants believed that the challenge of financing the cause of children requires not only the rationalization and optimalization of national budgets but also the mobilization of additional financial resources from all economic agencies, particularly through the encouragement of decentralized actions which optimize local resources and skills.

46. New sources for financing the cause of children therefore need to be found among non-governmental organizations, the private sector and local actors. It should be possible for public action in favour of children to be taken over by decentralized development actors who could also receive public budgetary resources under specific conditions.

47. The rich and varied debate on the experiences reported by economic agencies, municipalities, non-governmental organizations and international organizations brought out the following points:

- The similarity of the diagnoses made and solutions proposed concerning children;
- The importance of respect for ethical rules and transparency in all actions undertaken for the benefit of children, on which there is strong consensus;
- The adoption and implementation of precise norms and operating rules in order to strengthen the professionalism required for the efficiency of all actions to benefit children;
- The need for strong political will and clear options in support of genuine community participation along with an effective policy of deconcentration and decentralization, delegating a central role to municipalities;
- The promotion of a strategy of delegating tasks to local actors in order to ensure continuity and credibility;
- The importance and effectiveness of mobilizing relevant sources of action for the benefit of the child, such as the initiative by mayors in support of the rights of the child and action by parliamentarians, socio-professional organizations and microcredit bodies, as demonstrated by the experience reported;
- Better adaptation of new projects to specific local needs, which requires organized and well-targeted research, hence the need to envisage establishing a regional research centre for the Arab and African world connected to a network of local research units;
- The need to ensure better coordination between the various agencies of the United Nations system and the Bretton Woods institutions as well as the more expeditious choice and implementation of projects.

IV. Conclusions and recommendations of the Conference

48. The recommendations and conclusions of the Conference focused on the following main areas:

49.1. **According higher priority to children in national budgets**

(a) To establish a "national committee for children" which would be a viable option and an effective and efficient lobby to protect the best interests of children in the budgetary process. The committee would comprise government representatives, parliamentarians representing different political parties, members of civil society, academic institutions, the private sector, children themselves and UNICEF.

Bearing in mind the specific characteristics of each country, the committee would have the following functions:

- To advise the public authorities on the reallocation of accounts and budgets for children, taking into consideration the interests of children and international recommendations;
- To conduct studies on the impact of budgetary decisions concerning investments in the sphere of children, as well as periodic evaluations of policies undertaken for the benefit of children;
- To strive for greater coherence and efficiency in the management of additional funds generated by voluntary efforts and the initiatives of the private sector and economic operators;
- To prepare a periodic report on progress made in matters related to children, to be submitted to the legislature and the general public;
- To make proposals on the allocation of funds to priority projects for the benefit of children, including the monitoring of their impact.

In addition to these institutional functions, the Committee could play a significant role by promoting a participatory and affirmative approach of society at the level of both decision-making and the generation of proposals.

(b) Making an accurate analysis of expenditures through an integrated and cross-sectional approach to the question of children.

(c) Giving greater attention in national budgets to the protection, participation and rehabilitation of children.

(d) According the utmost importance to high-quality basic education in national budgets, in particular in the field of pre-school education.

49.2. **Effective and transparent utilization of available resources**

(a) Taking institutional measures designed to ensure the sustainability of action on behalf of children, providing conditions to ensure their effectiveness on a participatory basis and improving the cost-effectiveness of the use of resources allocated to programmes concerning children.

(b) Designing and developing tools for evaluating the impact of governmental policies on children, inter alia, through a "statistical watch".

(c) Creating "national accounts for children" in order to assess the financial outlay on behalf of children and evaluate achievements and measures planned to translate their rights and needs into practical action.

49.3. **Towards a partnership involving public authorities/private sector/local authorities/NGOs for the mobilization and utilization of financial resources**

(a) Integrating approaches and programmes relating to children and promoting partnerships between government, civil society and the private sector with a view to increasing the availability of resources for programmes devoted to children.

(b) Encouraging a decentralized partnership with a greater role being given to local authorities to promote neighbourhood management of children's issues in keeping with overall efforts to achieve decentralization.

(c) Calling on all parties involved to mobilize resources to be invested in the advancement of children. Synergies and complementarity should be sought to make possible direct financing by national and international donors of the activities of NGOs and of civil society.

(d) Delegating the design and implementation of certain projects relating to children to a greater

extent to actors in direct contact with the actual situation on the ground.

(e) Enhancing the institutional framework of NGOs in order to strengthen their role and encourage them to serve as a major public sector link for the benefit of children, in particular through four priority actions:

- The definition and adoption of specifications for working standards for such associations (prudential management rules, certification of accounts, reviewing skills and performance).
- The establishment of a statute for social workers and efforts to find long-term solutions for the payment of their remuneration.
- The creation of NGO networks for the benefit of children which would act as catalyst and a source of fresh ideas.
- The promotion of new formulas for the direct funding of NGOs by international, financial, multilateral or regional organizations, or institutional or private donors.
- The enhancement of their skills in needs identification, activity scheduling, project management, monitoring and evaluation.

(f) Encouraging the private sector, banks and enterprises, on a voluntary and unregulated basis, to conclude master contracts, through associations representing them, with NGOs that are organized and recognized for their contribution to improving the living condition of children. Such master contracts would serve as a model for specific contracts to be signed between the enterprises and child protection associations. Action undertaken on behalf of children would thus be ongoing, rather than sporadic and unfocused.

(g) Calling on financial markets, as part of the broadening of private sources of finance, to assist through the creation of ethical funds, or collectively managed funds, provided by the widest possible range of investors.

(h) Involving and empowering target communities as a further means of ensuring not only the efficiency of the action undertaken on behalf of children but also greater interest on the part of private sources of funding. In that connection, local authorities, as bodies representing the public, have a fundamental role to play in improving the living conditions of children. It will be necessary to make elected officials more aware and give them the necessary knowledge and skills to become familiar with the situation of children in their commune, to play a part in the implementation of legislative measures relating to children, and to establish and give effect to participatory communal development plans on behalf of children.

(i) Establishing, in accordance with a proposal by the Summit of African First Ladies (Marrakesh, 20-22 April 2001), an Arab-African observatory for the rights of the child which, in addition to statistical, sociological, economic and other research on children, would manage, in conjunction with UNICEF, a solidarity fund for Africa which should be able to attract additional funds from the industrialized countries as well.

(j) Building partnerships both within and between communes aimed at generating additional resources in collaboration with non-governmental organizations.

(k) Promoting microcredit as a tool for funding revenue-generating activities, in particular for women.

49.4. **Activating South/South cooperation and triangular cooperation**

(a) Encouraging South/South cooperation and sharing experiences and good practice in the field of child protection and inviting countries that are in a position to do so to assist the poor countries of Africa and the Arab world to address their enormous needs.

(b) Calling on international and regional bodies and developed donor countries to support triangular cooperation by allocating additional resources to it and by helping to identify needs and the means of meeting them.

(c) Promoting more effective Arab-African solidarity.

(d) Envisaging the creation of regional Arab-African networks of parties active in child-related fields.

49.5. **For promotion of greater commitment in international cooperation**

(a) The developed countries should honour their frequently repeated commitment to devote 0.7 per

cent of their GNP to official development aid, ensuring that 20 per cent of those resources are allocated to basic social services.

(b) The developing countries are invited, within the framework of the 20/20 initiative, to devote 20 per cent of their budgetary resources to basic social services.

(c) The international community is invited to give careful consideration to an approach similar to the 20/20 initiative specifically focusing on children.

(d) The international community is called on to strengthen mechanisms for the peaceful settlement of conflicts so that the countries that are thus freed from security constraints will decide to reduce their military expenditure and allocate the available resources to the social sectors.

(e) The eligibility qualifications for the heavily indebted poor countries initiative should be relaxed in order to enable all countries involved to benefit under less restrictive conditions, particularly the least developed countries.

(f) The creditor countries are invited totally to cancel the public debt owed to them by the least developed countries.

(g) The establishment of a multilateral trading system that is fair, equitable and more open to the goods and services of the developing countries would provide a means of generating additional resources estimated at $100 billion per annum. Such resources would be used to finance development objectives, in particular the priorities for the benefit of children.

(h) The donor countries and international financial institutions are invited to promote concessional loans in favour of the middle-income developing countries intended for social services.

(i) The creditor countries are invited to restructure part of their debts as social investments in the developing countries.

(j) The promotion of coordination between agencies, funds and programmes of the United Nations and the international financial institutions, while taking into consideration specific national and regional features in the formulation and implementation of the various programmes and projects for the benefit of children.

(k) Taking into account the conclusions of the meeting of the Economic and Social Council with the Bretton Woods institutions, and of the forthcoming international conference on the financing of development.

A major feature of the closing meeting was the address by Her Royal Highness Princess Lalla Meryem in which she stated that the recommendations and proposals adopted by the conference demonstrated that the proceedings would have a positive impact on the special session of the United Nations General Assembly the following September, adding that it was incumbent on participants, through an act of firm political will, to ensure the implementation of what had been agreed on for the benefit of children so as to combat all the hardships, and their adverse social impact, which children unfortunately still had to face in many Arab and African countries.

Her Royal Highness made a point of conveying the indignation of the Kingdom of Morocco, shared by all participants at the conference and by the entire international community, at the plight of Palestinian children who faced the systematic aggression of the Israeli war machine in violation of all recognized international treaties.

She also expressed the hope that the blockade imposed on Iraqi children, from which they suffered on a daily basis, would be lifted as soon as possible.

Her Royal Highness Princess Lalla Meryem concluded by conveying to participants the appreciation and greetings of His Majesty King Mohammed VI and of His Royal Highness Prince Moulay Rachid, President of the National Commission responsible for preparing for the United Nations special session devoted to children.

Annex IV

[Original: Arabic]

Arab Regional Civil Society Forum on Children
Rabat, 15-19 February 2001

Rabat Declaration

The countries of the world having assembled more than one decade ago at the World Summit for Children, which adopted the World Declaration on the Survival, Protection and Development of Children and the Plan of Action for its implementation in the 1990s,

The Arab States having committed themselves, as part of the international community, to the World Declaration and Plan of Action and having pledged to implement their provisions and espouse their principles in order to create better conditions for children, now and in the future,

The Convention on the Rights of the Child having sought to protect children in the areas of health and education and to enhance standards of child care within the family in an environment of well-being and stability that is free of all bigotry and hate and protects children from the calamities of violence, murder and war,

The commitments given by the governments of the Arab world having placed upon them the responsibility of taking the necessary initiatives and measures to facilitate the implementation of the Convention in the spirit required and of adopting effective programmes to change the situation in which children find themselves and provide them with the opportunity to live in a fitting world that is free of discrimination,

The organizations of civil society having played an important intellectual, organizational and monitoring role in matters relating to the implementation of the Convention in the spirit intended, in exhorting, prompting and pressuring political leaders, governments, the private sector and parliaments to adopt strategies for enhancing the situation of children and to develop suitable procedures and enact legislation for that purpose, and in coordinating their joint action at the regional and international levels,

The future of children being dependent on the realization of their hope to live in a world that is worthy of them and receptive to their views and capacities and to their strong and generous aspirations as citizens with rights and with a say, thus requiring them to be brought into political, economic and social decision-making,

And the survival and development of children, as a human and moral endeavour and the duty and responsibility of all and sundry, necessitating as it does the promotion of partnerships, the establishment of inter-country relations among non-governmental organizations and the utilization of all available human and financial resources to strengthen the economic policies that relate to programmes for children in all fields with a view to reducing disparities and eliminating the scourge of poverty so as to achieve a new world order that benefits children and replace a world order that aggravates the hardships of children and accelerates their demise,

Accordingly,

The inter-Arab and regional non-governmental organizations and civil society entities meeting in Rabat from 15 to 19 February 2001 at the invitation of the Arab Council for Childhood and Development, the Arab Institute for Human Rights, Morocco's National Child Rights Monitoring Centre and the United Nations Children's Fund hereby affirm:

That they shall strive, in coordination and in partnership and in the best interests of children throughout the world and in the Arab World in particular, to employ their efforts, their expertise and all their capacities in order to give effect to the values enshrined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child as the very minimum on which their will accords with that of the international community;

That they shall urge all regional and international organizations as well as States, governments and leaders throughout the world to adhere meticulously to

the Convention and to formulate economic and development policies to benefit children and their lives for the sake of their safety and dignity in full equality while sheltered from war, blockade and disease;

That they shall, with firm conviction, make the participation of children a central goal, given that the only way to build the future of children is through them and with them;

That they shall spare no effort to urge Arab governments to discharge the duty of recognizing and protecting the rights of children, adolescents and young persons, providing all the resources and instrumentalities necessary for their education and responding to their needs and, for this purpose, to bring their national legislation into conformity with the spirit and substance of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, to ratify all the human rights instruments and withdraw their reservations, to expand the scope of basic freedoms and to respect opposing views in a democratic manner and within a State founded on law and justice;

That they shall renew their commitment to strive for the lifting of blockades and boycotts and shall urge a halt to wars, conflicts and occupation and the elimination of their devastating impact on child victims in Palestine, Iraq, Sudan, Libya, Somalia, the occupied Golan Heights and elsewhere.